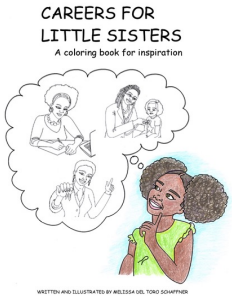
An Interview with Melissa del Toro Schaffner



December, 2021 Featured Guest
at
Time with Tannia
(http://timewithtannia.com)

By:

Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés

1. You are a multifaceted woman with an interesting background. From Electrical Engineer and Project Manager to Voice Over Artist. Do you consider the discipline of those careers provided you the knowledge to ease the transition in becoming a Voice Over Artist?

Absolutely! The professional skills in communication, punctuality, conflict resolution and teamwork are also a fundamental part of entrepreneurship. Discipline is key when running your own business. Even though most of us start them for flexibility and time freedom, we must treat our businesses with the discipline of a corporate job and not a hobby if we want to make any progress - especially in a competitive field like Voiceover. We need to be competent enough to perform ALL company operations until we have a large enough client base/sales revenue to hire help. The skills I've grown that I didn't have in my corporate careers that I now rely on every day are a greater level of resourcefulness and creativity in marketing myself.

2. What are some of the challenges and rewards of being a Voice Over Artist?

There are so many of both! At the beginning, there is a steep initial outlay and investment in equipment, acting training and tech to make you competent enough to deliver a professional service. And these days, voice actors must also establish their brand, messaging, website and marketing to differentiate themselves in a very crowded online marketplace. That initial climb can be a REAL challenge. You can go through the full spectrum of emotions from depression to elation in one week! The joy is when you find and attract clients that trust you to help their projects shine! Using my voice to tell stories from the heart, whether they be my stories or the stories of others, unlocked my life's mission and is an incredibly rewarding and self actualizing career. Plus, I get to push myself to grow in ways I never would have as an employee in corporate. Voice acting is a great job as a parent (especially when the kids are in school) because I can choose the clients, projects, genres, and teach my daughter the importance of words, how we use them, and the power of our voice.

3. Are tongue twisters, breathing techniques, and vocalization part of your daily routine?

Hydration is an important part of Voice acting, as with most of life. It's important to be hydrated 24 hours BEFORE any long form performance like audiobooks, e-learning narrations or dynamic character performances. For most of my performances, especially Spanish scripts, I typically enunciate the copy slowly and deliberately until my tongue and throat feel warmed up and limber. There are some phrases like "lemon liniments" and General stretching of my mouth and pushing my tongue in a circle between my lips and teeth that helps. I know some people do, but as a time-starved mom I don't do any specific thing every single time. I find that if I just say the words of the copy until my tongue has muscle memory, the whole session goes quicker and much smoother.

4. What are the required education, training, and equipment of a Voice Over Artist?

There is no specific degree needed to be a voice actor. Voice actors come from many different former careers and walks of life. Being a Renaissance person actually HELPS in this career. Voice acting IS primarily acting, so some people have a more natural affinity or can use their communication background to apply it to performing. Most people get into Voice acting by taking a beginners commercial voiceover course. That is, learning how to perform short :30 commercials you see on tv, and hear on the internet and radio. This gives a very direct line of understanding as to the subtleties of voice acting performances. There are also other genres of voiceover and courses offered by many different coaches and VO outfits to practice and get better. Since there are so many people offering beginner courses, it's important to vet out these individuals and organizations bc many of them have an end game to take your money and leave you mildly incompetent or no closer to your career goals than when you started. As far as equipment, many voice actors have moved almost exclusively to working from professionally outfitted home recording studios since the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. This includes an excellent quality microphone that works well with your voice (I have the Rode NT1-A), an interface from the microphone to your computer (I use the Scarlett 2i2), recording software (I use Adobe Audition and iZotope RX-7) and a great computer (I have a MacBook Air). Services like Dropbox, a professional email through Google Suite, a decent website with your demo above the scroll line and other business software are also a must.

5. When reading a book with different characters, how do you prevent changing their voices and personality?

Typically, the author of a book has an idea of what they want each character to sound like. They can defined by things like a dominant personality trait, ethnicity, attitude, pace of speaking, male/female, adult/child. If there are many characters, it makes sense to record a little reference clip of one line said by that character. Or, if I have an idea of a "typical" voice I use for certain people, I may just write the description next to the character name on a character spreadsheet. For my narration of The Untold Tales Podcast (http://hyperurl.co/Untold-Tales) , the stories are fairly short, so I can describe my characters by physical and personality traits and remember their voices.

6. Would you like to share your most memorable blooper and the lessons learned?

I guess my most memorable "blooper" was answering a VERY IMPORTANT question wrong on my episode of Who Wants To Be A Millionaire! I had beat all odds to become a contestant on the show when Cedric was the host. I used my time proven methods of manifestation and mindset management to pass the 3 part audition for the show! I prepared every detail of my appearance like an Olympian preparing to compete in the games. The one thing I didn't do in all of my preparation was to see myself leaving the show with the million. I only saw myself PN the show. And so when crunch time came - instead of making a clear minded move, I threw it away with a guess. I felt myself doing it at the time. It almost happened in slow motion in my mind! It was such a great lesson to me on mindset manifestation and follow through. When we achieve something we really desire, we need to see past that event and into the life we will actually be living when the dream becomes a reality. The end goal is the happiness we experience as a result of the journey, not necessarily how it all comes about.

Here's a link to that fateful episode! https://youtu.be/mUtU2JBCJms

7. How does the fast development of Artificial Intelligence could affect the marketplace of Voice Over Artists like you?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a hot and sensitive topic in the Voiceover industry. Many actors are feeling a range of emotions - but mostly fear of the unknown. Not knowing exactly how this technology will be used to "replace" voice actors or how good it will get in the coming years, it can be challenging to plan our careers and develop bodies of work and clients that may become obsolete within the next decade. The guarantee is that it is coming. And that it **will** change things. But, this is true of all industry disrupters and it's not necessarily a bad thing. It just means voice actors will need to be flexible and find where the human performance is still valued and needed in the VAST landscape of audio opportunities. There is no substitute for human emotion, connection and heart. And, not every audio needs to be an award winning performance. The biggest concern is the unethical offers of many companies seeking to buy actors' voices and do with them whatever they please in perpetuity for a small one-time payment. As you can imagine, your voice is who you are. And every voice, like every fingerprint, is a unique key possessed only by the holder. So when someone buys your voice - where do "you" come in? Is your security now compromised? Can people use your voice to say things and then blame you? It's a very sticky conversation and all we know is to watch out and find ways AI could help us GROW our careers (perhaps, use our AI voice to do more auditions in a day, do more e-learning projects that typically have tiny to zero budgets, do volunteer textbook-to-audio description, etc.) As our ancestors had to adapt to the new technology in factories, machinery, and transportation that replaced jobs - we will need to find the jobs that machines cannot do and work together to expand our

world of opportunities - not shrink it.

8. You are the co-creator, producer, and narrator of *"The Untold Tales Podcast"* — a short story sci-fi audio drama. Tell us about this journey, your vision, and where can our readers listen to it?

Episodes 10 and 23 of the Untold Tales Podcast are a great place to learn about the history, mission and heart of this podcast. In a nutshell, I (the narrator) met Jeff (the writer) at a writers meetup in Arizona. I was seeking to meet more authors as a narrator of audiobooks, so I gave an informational presentation about what goes into creating an audiobook. One person really stood out in the room. He had the best, smartest, most insightful questions. I learned he'd self published over a dozen books and had a plethora of writings available ready-to-narrate. I pitched the idea of creating a podcast to get his writings visible to a global audience and at first, he said no. But then the pandemic hit, everyone was home 24/7, and we decided to channel our home bound creativity into this experiment- The Untold Tales Podcast. Our podcast is about the writers, artists and community of listeners. We seek to provide the highest quality short stories that you can start and finish on a grocery run, or on the way to work or now that people are at home much more, while you are cleaning up after a meal or waiting at a doctors office. We value accessibility and availability- so we've made sure our podcast can be found on all podcasting platforms and players in the known universe. We currently do have an open call for submissions out to sci-fi and sci-fi mystery short story writers. Our writers are of the highest caliber and many of them are well known for doing amazing things. Victoria Wieck, jewelry maven of ShopHQ fame, made her sci-fi short story debut on Untold Tales and Don Muchow just become the first man to compete a cross-country run from Disneyland to Disney World at 59 years young and with T1 Diabetes.

You can listen to the podcast here! http://hyperurl.co/Untold-Tales

And watch the Season 2 trailer here! https://www.melissadeltoro.com/Untold-Tales-Podcast-Season-2

Here is a link for sci-fi writers to submit short stories to be read on the podcast!
https://www.melissadeltoro.com/Call-for-Submissions-2021

9. Now let us talk about Melissa, the author and illustrator. How do you envision your Minority Girl Empowerment Coloring Book *"Careers for Little Sisters"*?

As a Latina woman and electrical engineer, most of my education and career was spent in male-dominated fields as workplaces. So, I am very connected to the subject of "female empowerment", which was the driver of this book. For me, it gets down to very practical things in the workplace and the world like access and understanding women's health needs, having a good bathroom to use at your workplace, and having people to talk to and support with sensitive issues in your daily work life.

When I was living in NYC with my new husband at 40 years young, I called my mom who lived in Arizona at the time. We were talking about how there really wasn't much by way of books or coloring materials to empower little girls to see themselves in non-traditionally minority and female careers (S.T.E.A.M., movie directors, etc). And in 2015, there wasn't. It isn't until after I published this book that I saw explosions of this kind of material - even Mattel came out with a "You Can Do Anything" line of dolls that even had descriptions eerily similar to those in my book! After the conversation with my mother, at 41 and hugely pregnant with my daughter, I completed and hit publish on what was then "Createspace" and is not KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) for the English version of Careers for Little

Sisters: A Coloring Book for Inspiration. After she was born, I followed up with the sister book Spanish version, Profesiones para Nuestras Ninas. My goal was to show real looking people with real bodies doing real jobs that are available to people with the dream to do them. I took my inspiration from the people I saw on the New York City subways and occupations I had learned about through my 40 years that did not historically have women or women of color well represented. One day soon, I plan to release Volume 2 of each version!

Careers for Little Sisters English (Careers for Little Sisters: A coloring book for inspiration)
https://amzn.to/3oJjr0r

Careers for Little Sisters Spanish (Profesiónes para Nuestras Niñas: Un libro de colorear para la inspiración) https://amzn.to/3mCeHYL

10. Where can our readers contact you?

The best place to find me is on my website. You'll find all of my social media links on the upper right hand corner as well as a link to my quarterly newsletter and courses I am currently offering on empowerment and motivation.

https://www.melissadeltoro.com

11. A word of advice for beginner Voice Over Artist.

It is a long game. It may be MANY years before you see the fruits of your labor rewarded. But it will come. The key personality traits it will test are your passion, dedication, resourcefulness, resilience and self worth. If you have a passion to tell stories, are committed to training and practicing your craft, and open to direct marketing and approaching hundreds and hundreds of clients, talent managers, and agents to offer them your services, Voiceover will be a very rewarding career for you!

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https://www.bigstockphoto.com/search/?contributor=Boricua63&safesearch=n
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